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Mental Realities of the Multi-Culture: Multiple Othering in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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As defined by the International Labor Organization, "the term *Indigenous peoples* refers to tribal peoples in independent counties whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions" (Bastien, Kremer, Kuokkanen, and Vickers 25). How much, though, are the customs and traditions previously described conditionary or, rather, a circumstance of the person experiencing them? For inferior or outcast members of society, certain nuances and adherence to normative behavior means less because they are not a part of the power that creates or enforces them. In the pre-colonial system, the reality of one's existence pervades throughout the community as the center defines and subjugates those it deems inferior. This singular othering, with preexisting hierarchies, builds on a binary that the group has normalized and rationalizes through history. However, in colonization, mental realities of multiple othering arise, breaking apart the understanding and inculcation of cultural binaries. Colonization becomes the catalyst that sheds one form of subjugation while (un)knowingly transitioning an entire people into imperialist oppression. But the ability to reverse an inferior member's position in the colonized community or, at the very least, build mental realities of equalization with a previous subjugating force entice those who were othered in the pre-colonial society. The sacrifice, the one constant, is that the entire colonized culture is, then, othered by the imperialistic force, dehumanizing them and

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creating a binary that oppresses the pre-colonial mind. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon contends that "because it is a systemized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity, colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: 'Who am I in reality?'" (182). Many times, a patriarchal society emphasizes the masculine as the center and the feminine as the outlier, "naturally." As this is often the only governing style women, children, and effeminate men are familiar with, it seems natural for them to fall in step with the ongoing ordering of this masculine hierarchy. However, when a colonizing force arrives and dismantles the masculine through the sacred, government, and family and community dynamics, it places individuals at a crossroads mentally as they process and reconstruct value systems instilled in them as far back as they can remember. In understanding the reconstruction process, we must also acknowledge the inherent desire for the initial other, or non-masculine, to wield power and become an inclusive member in the community rather than a peripheral observer and enabler to the center. What happens, though, when this role-reversal comes into conflict with inculcated values firmly implanted in the past? The initial other mentally traverses each realm and then hybridizes both cultures or rejects the colonizer and reasserts one's own place as an other. There is also the question of masculine mental realities as they are forced to see peripheral members of the pre-colonized community become valued and prosper as center doppelgängers in the colonized world. Having been in an excellent position in the pre-colonial world, the previous center often rejects and fights colonization as it removes control and power, passively or blatantly, from the masculine.

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All of these questions appear in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. While Okonkwo remains the main character in the novel, secondary characters hold an important place in describing the colonization process that occurs and the internal mental journey the assimilated people experience. Between the children (especially Nwoye), the women, and the men (Okonkwo), Achebe takes three different roads in depicting the dichotomy between the pre-colonized and colonized Ibo members' understanding of their own place within the larger community. The white colonizers use both subterfuge and the pre-colonized center's passivity toward others and outcasts in their own community to come in and slowly hoard power until defiance is unable to retain the Ibo customs and traditions. Through the mental processes experienced by the three main groups previously mentioned (children, women, and men), we can gain a better understanding of the changing realities that each has to face and the amount of acceptance or rejection they present based on their previous position within the Ibo culture.

The most important character in Achebe's novel is not Okonkwo, but rather Nwoye because he represents the recognition and acceptance of the white culture. As a character, both internally and externally, he is constantly othered by either his father or himself. He also becomes a staple of the effeminate man because he can never truly give himself over to the expectations of being a man in Umuofia. Throughout the novel, Nwoye feels an automatic affinity with the feminine. He enjoys the stories of women and is drawn to the newness of change rather than the methods of tradition. When Ikemefuna comes into his family clan, Nwoye is able to internally compromise the masculine-feminine conflict in his mind because Ikemefuna is able to tell masculine stories in new,

interesting ways. This entices Nwoye to the masculine as he could finally find a part of it he related to. Even though he did not completely immerse himself in the masculine, he was able to pretend for the sake of the stories Ikemefuna provided him. In Nwoye idolizing Ikemefuna, he becomes a mimic before he even comes in contact with white culture. Internally, Nwoye masks himself:

> On receiving such a message through a younger brother or sister, he would grumble aloud about women and their troubles…. Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell…. But he now knew that they were for foolish women and children, and he knew that his father wanted him to be a man. And so he feigned that he no longer cared for women's stories. And when he did that he saw that his father was pleased, and no longer rebuked him or beat him. (Achebe 52-54)

However, upon Ikemefuna's death, he no longer is driven to manliness because he understands it in negative terms. This rationale in processing the binary as masculine-equals-bad is an important indication as to how easily he could be assimilated. When the Ibo construct is based on the opposite binary, and he chooses to purge himself of living along those customs, he becomes othered twice by his inability to be a man and his unwillingness to participate in his cultural reality at the time. As Renate Zahar argues, "indications of alienated behavior on the part of the colonized can be discerned first of all in his attitude toward the institutions and norms of his own traditional society and those of the colonial, mostly industrialized society" (Zahar 36).When the white man came, it

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was the perfect opportunity for him to actualize the different reality he always desired. Nwoye did not even understand the "mad logic of the Trinity," but it did put into perspective "the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed" (Achebe 147). A new religion spoke to him because it did not oppress the feminine that he was drawn to; it drew him in and allowed him to sing the songs. Nwoye did not understand the brutality of his tribe and did not want to live a life that might include killing someone like Ikemefuna. He had little connection to the sacred because it represented the qualities of Ibo life that did not entice him. He had no desire to farm yams; he did not participate in the wrestling ceremony, even though his father was wrestling at his age; and he always juxtaposed himself to his father so that he would not become enfranchised by a power that did not represent his ethical beliefs. Therefore, when Christianity came to Mbanta and brought with it the songs and stories that fascinated him, he allowed himself to be converted.

Nwoye's transition to white culture also gave him the feeling of agency that he never had before. He leaves for Umuofia to teach young Christians to read and write as an example of his commitment to the Christian movement. More than anything, this is his rejection of his former self. As is suggested in *The Empire Writes Back*, "language is power because words construct reality. The assumption by the powerless is that words are the signifiers of a pre-given reality, a reality and a truth that is located at the center" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 88). Since language and reality are interwoven, Nwoye creates a reality construct in which he realizes his potential for power as a wielder of the colonized language. Not only has he learned the European tradition to read and write, but

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he has been given the power to teach the language to others (who will remain others). This power does not exceed that of the colonizer, but does give him validation above the unassimilated.

It becomes necessary to recognize this rejection because Nwoye benefits from it purely out of luck. Had he been born in a previous generation, the ability to reverse his role within Umuofia without paying dues and interpreting the world as Ibo men saw would have been a fantasy. Nwoye's desire *not* to be an Ibo man eclipsed his foresight to see how he was being manipulated by the colonizer. As Robert Wren, author of *Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels*, describes it:

> the invader made it possible for the distressed to find relief outside the clan, and in that condition stress became intolerable. Within Okonkwo's household, repression of the feminine part of the universal duality produced an anguish that Nwoye contained until he discovered it could be relieved. That relief was to open the way to what the white man saw from the start—anarchy—and to the failure of the civil order. (59)

Nwoye, and people like him, were the key to colonization without complete decimation of the entire clan (as was the case in Abame). The colonizer created the façade that the colonized had a place at the communal table, whereas before they had been servants, thus pandering to the outsiders' desire to start again.

Nwoye becomes a part of the unending oppressive cycle that Franz Fanon describes as being "perpetually locked in the state of becoming" (Sharpley-Whiting 34). In *Things Fall Apart*, this "becoming" and *tabula rasa* movement came in the form of

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Christian names. For Nwoye, it was Isaac. This is particularly defiant as the origin of that name dates to the Old Testament and represents a man who is committed to folk traditions and oral storytelling. Achebe's decision to name him Isaac exhibits both Nwoye's refusal to be a part of those traditions and also magnifies Nwoye's lack of place in the Christian, white world as he does not fully present an image the culture remembers. He thus lacks a place in either society and exists between worlds as he refuses the naming tradition of his own culture, spiting the Ibo by exaggerating a custom (storytelling) he always loved and associating it with the white colonizer and remaining non-white by choosing a name that is disjointed from the colonizing motives (reading and writing), cementing him in the purgatory of "becoming."

Even though Nwoye does not fully realize his involvement in the colonization process, he does understand the power dynamics that still exist in his family. In imagining his future, he thinks about how he will "return later to his mother and his brothers and sisters and convert them to the new faith" (Achebe 152). This foreshadowing of his father's physical and mental inability to transition between binaries allows us to glimpse the inevitable ending of Okonkwo, but it also says a lot about the evaporating (if even present) bond that connects the two. His exclusion of his father, because of what he stands for, is the one thing Nwoye and Okonkwo share—a distaste for the life their father is leading because it does not represent the better traditions they see reflected in their own lives. However, what makes Unoka fail in his tribe is what makes Nwoye such a successful candidate for colonization.

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Nwoye embodies an outside member of Umuofia who had the capacity to succeed and participate in Ibo traditions to the maximum extent, due to his maleness, but chose not to do so. His decision not to participate in these customs labeled him effeminate and, later, a woman. However, this individual decision to break apart from the pre-colonial tribe contributed to the shared breakdown. Because community was such an important component of the Ibo culture, when members began leaving for a different, individualistic society, the colonized identity left with them. As argued in the article "The Mental Health of Aboriginal Peoples: Transformations of Identity and Community":

> the creation of an explicit ethnic identity requires that certain beliefs, practices, or characteristics be elevated to core values and claimed as shared experiences. This naturally tends to obscure individual variation and the constant flux of personal and social definitions of the self and other. A shared history invests ethnic identity with social value. (Kirmayer, Brass, and Tait 611)

For Nwoye, his understanding of the Ibo traditions was not paramount in how he defined his own core values. His decision to leave was, in fact, due to his materialized core values that just so happen to have been reflected in the colonized world. Whether or not the intention of the colonizer was for the colonized to find inclusion is not the question, but rather how the colonizers manipulated that feeling into passivity for their own benefit. For Nwoye and the rest of the Umuofian others, such as women and outcasts, the feigned inclusion was enough.

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As opposed to Nwoye, who was othered by an internal struggle between cultural expectation and personal joy, women are automatically othered by the Ibo society as the commodity of them represents status, the control of them correlates to manliness, and their participation in sacred traditions is secondary. The binary in Umuofia is that manliness is good and womanliness is bad. This contrast allowed the colonizer to exaggerate the gender differences inherent in Umuofia and offered a system through which it seemed women were equal. In Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis's "Remembering Conquest: Religion, Colonization, and Sexual Violence: A Thai Experience," Thai women are discussed as empowered by inclusion in the sacred because it "attempts in changing unfair family laws … as well as re-reading and re-interpretation of certain elements in traditional and religious cultures which have been putting women in subordinate positions for so long" (Lewis 15). The same is true of the women in *Things Fall Apart*. As brides and wives, women only experience the sacred as peripheral members or at the hands of men. Even on the ceremonial day of uri, the masculine dominates. Only men are present throughout the entire ceremony; an amount of wine is given to represent the worth of the bride; and tedious, routine tasks, such as Okonkwo wondering who will prepare his afternoon meal while the women prepare for the ceremony, must still be addressed. The bridal scene in the novel gains importance as it progresses because it is an example of how even rites of passage are subject to the whims of Ibo binaries. For example, wrestling for men becomes a ceremony that allows some to experience existence beyond themselves, whereas women are commodities for community maneuvering that benefit their male counterparts. Even beyond the bridal

ceremony, as wives, women are only given indirect access to the sacred by producing sons. As we discover in chapter 9, Okonkwo sacrifices a goat, "as was the custom," when Anasi has her third son (Achebe 79). Even though she had equal part in the creation of the child, she has no part in the ceremony of sacrifice.

In understanding the sacred, Agbala, the Oracle, must also be considered. Agbala represents wholly the gender dynamics in the villages as the uncapitalized word *agbala* means a woman or a man who has taken no title (Achebe 13). Because it emphasizes in men something lacked, it enforces the aforementioned binary. Agbala and colonization are at odds with one another because they both have the ability to control the mental reality of those who administer faith to them. In the case of Chielo, Agbala controls her as his servant and possesses her being to such an extent that "anyone seeing Chielo in ordinary life would hardly believe she was the same person" (Achebe 49). One scene of particular importance is when Chielo admonishes Ekwefi for her desire to accompany her daughter to the Oracle. This is the ultimate display of the binary as the male sacred (Agbala) controls a woman (Chielo) who makes other women (Ekwefi) inferior and distances them from the sacred. It becomes unnecessary for men to micromanage the relation of women to the sacred because men have women enforcing subordinate roles amongst themselves.

As well as direct contact with the sacred, women were also excluded from routine customs that connected men to the sacred; among these were farming and participating in wrestling. Crops were split into groups as women were responsible for "coco-yams, beans and cassava" while the "yam, the king of crops, was a man's crop" (Achebe 23).

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Since yams were the lifeline crop of the Ibo people, it was thus gendered as male, and men were responsible for its care. The separation imposes the binary once again because that which gives life, that which they took to the market, is developed by the hands of men and, therefore, implies that the prosperity of the community never rests in the hands of women. In the ceremony of wrestling, men, especially Okonkwo, recognize the sport's sacred potential to turn the participants into something more than human (Achebe 48). This should be noted because it allows for the sacred to exist on several plains so that men can experience it on different levels—physically through wrestling, auditorily through drumming, and mentally through the association of victory with excellence and leadership in the future. The masculine retains a strong grip around the sacred that is nearly impossible for the feminine to peer in upon.

The one exception of this throughout the novel is in the case of priestesses, who are allowed to practice the sacred. I would argue, however, that this is at the behest of the male figure, Agbala, and that the community itself only lifts those women who most strenuously adhere to the male dominant binary as worthy of a title and rank involving the sacred. Although that is based on assumptive reasoning, the pattern of subjugation in Ibo culture is such that a "fallen women" figure would not be considered a candidate for receiving the most unusual type of agency, which connects the feminine to power.

Upon the colonizers' presence, humanity is taken away from both men and women, and the other becomes all non-white people. In his article on psychiatric colonization in the *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, Phil Barker discusses the struggle of self-definition in a dehumanizing environment: "the concept of the

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'colonization of the self' finds an echo in the literature on oppression or more specifically in feminism…. For all such peoples, self-determination lies at the core of their struggle to recover their full human status" (98).

Although the colonized group is always in a state of flux and recovery after imperialism is upon them, I would argue that *recovery* is the wrong word to use for women, as they were never granted full involvement to begin with. As women became colonized, they were experiencing an internal validation in their minds more than anything else. The psychological colonization of women caused them to feel as though they were recovering from something, when really they were just experiencing the reality of their existence within their tribe, for better or worse. This expectation that women can get back to a space previously unoccupied by women is backwards in that it expects colonized women to arrive again at a place they have never been. If the women of Umuofia did find equal footing with their male counterparts, as is suggested by the white colonizer, then they are no longer getting back, but rather appropriating a value system that works in the confines of their Ibo traditions.

The shifting binaries between the masculine-feminine and colonizer-colonized remain important in relation to the sacred because, even in the wake of colonization, access to or treatment of the sacred does not change. On one hand, the assumption in the Ibo culture is that the sacred should continue unchanged because if it changes, they then acknowledge that the colonizer has infiltrated the most important piece of the pre-colonial system, the glue that attaches a living people with the traditions and customs they inherited from their ancestors. On the other hand, if the colonized people of Umuofia

do not allow access to the sacred for previous othered persons, they risk losing them to the colonizer because imperialism offers direct shared contact with the sacred. Even when the entire Ibo culture is othered, the location of the sacred does not shift and is still surrounded by men. Because the whole of Umuofia is othered and two sacreds exist, one accessible and one not, it seems plainly logical that those pre-colonial others will sway in the direction of Christianity simply for inclusion. Further, for members with enough foresight to recognize the trend of colonization, from Abame to Mbanta to Umuofia, it is almost a given to join ranks with the colonizing sacred, maybe not so much because it reflects one's own belief system but because when the tidal wave hits, those who are assimilated, colonized others have a place above those defiant others who continually try to purge themselves of the colonizer.

The occurrence of colonization may encourage women because it seems to offer potential for change when the first woman converts, "her husband and his family were already becoming highly critical of such a woman and…it was good riddance" (Achebe 151). She was alienated from her tribe even before the colonizing power came because she had only produced twins. Like Nwoye, she belonged to a community that had a discriminant value basis that delegitimized her contributions as worthless and questionable. So when she went to the white man's culture and was told by Mr. Brown that "the leaders of the land in the future would be men and women," the colonizer's message seemed to offer the promise of de-subordinating her (Achebe 181).

The male-female binary goes so far as to pervade the governing system as well. When Okonkwo is exiled from Umuofia for Mbanta, he is accused of committing a

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female crime, or rather, one of inadvertency (Achebe 124). This crime-type oppresses Ibo women because it shapes the ability to be violent as gendered. Upon leaving his tribe to return to his motherland, it is explained that "a man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland" (Achebe 134). This is insulting to Okonkwo as he does not want the refuge of protection but rather the freedom of his homeland. It also emasculates him because it labels the violence he is able to commit as feminine rather than the masculine type he is familiar with as a warrior. In the transition from Umuofia to Mbanta, it is important to recognize that *the connection to place* has a different meaning for men and women: men stay in the land of their fathers, while women are born in one place, may leave because of marriage, and then are returned upon death.

Until the end of the novel, which we cannot see beyond, men in Umuofia continue their preferential association of men as useful and women as dispensable. In chapter 19, an old men directs a speech to the young men and says,

> "we come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so. You may ask why I am saying all this. I say it because I fear for the younger generation, for you people. …An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his fathers and his ancestors, like a hunter's dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master. I fear for you; I fear for the clan." (167)

One of the main reasons that Umuofia was colonized so successfully was that the power figures in the tribe did not recognize the importance of women and outcast members

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joining the colonizing force. By being indifferent, the poison had time to seep into the veins and allow for maximum paralysis. The discussion of the colonizing force's ability to assimilate Ibo members should have happened before it occurred, not at the point when their "own men and boys have joined the rank of strangers" (Achebe 176). That is like burning a rope from both ends and hoping it extinguishes before it reaches the center, or rather, its maximum strength. The men in *Things Fall Apart* became victims of their own sexist binary; as the women already understood hierarchies of superiority from the position of subordinate, they mentally hybridized colonization more easily, whereas men now became inferior and are no longer the pinnacle of society, destroying the entire structure and equalizing all of them. Women were, understandably, better prepared for imperial colonization because they had been standing at intersections of change at several different points in their lives: from childhood to marriage to motherhood to death, women were expected to traverse several worlds both physically and mentally. On the other hand, men such as Okonkwo were unable to sacrifice their customs and traditions to become colonized.

Although the transition from Ibo culture came easier for outlier members of Ibo society, it did not for centered members such as Okonkwo. Understandably, he was unable to justify the benefits of white culture because he was part of a community that had benefited him for so long. Okonkwo saw the world as one opportunity after another to attain glory, which is contradictory to the European assumption that Africa has an "inglorious past to which Europe brought the blessing of civilization" (Achebe 70). Okonkwo was someone who had complete inclusion, the ability to experience life

without boundaries, and had others looking up to him. Until his death, he was a stalwart member of Umuofia.

In the framework of Okonkwo's mind, gendered definitions are key because he adheres to the binary whole-heartedly. He believes that "man" is defined as success and that success is attained through titles, wives, and sons. Okonkwo also believed that a man was the embodiment of aggression and that aggression should be released as a sign of one's own ability to wield the power of violence. He, therefore, is embarrassed of his lineage because his father was "never happy when it came to wars" and "was in fact a coward and could not bear the sight of blood" (Achebe 6). Any amount of unmanliness or laziness throughout his life becomes a reminder of his father who even in death was inglorious.

This binary even inserts itself into tribal ceremonies when "every man whose arm was strong…was expected to invite large numbers of guests from far and wide" to the New Yam Festival (Achebe 37) and how in wrestling "the desire to conquer and subdue…was like the desire for woman" (Achebe 42). This lack of equality to the feminine even pervades the tradition of storytelling, as Okonkwo questions a man's (Ndulue's) masculinity for being so close to his wife and sharing with her what seemed to be "one mind" (Achebe 68). His response to the story is "I did not know that…I thought he was a strong man in his youth" (Achebe 68), implying that at some juncture from youth to adulthood Ndulue's masculinity had been stripped for falling prey to the feminine. As well as associating Ndulue's equality to his wife with weakness, Okonkwo also has difficulty processing the Ibo tradition of storytelling when the story conflicts

with his individual belief system, which puts the binary above all else. This section is a precursor to how Okonkwo will interpret colonization because it suggests his mental incapability to experience his place as an individual within the community as anything beyond his prescribed connection to the masculine.

Manhood is the ultimate reality of Okonkwo's life. His perception of himself and others is dictated by the façade of emotionless, unrepentant aggression. This comes to Okonkwo in the form of Ikemefuna when, even at the direction of the Oracle, he is told not to kill the boy himself. However, as the first blow comes upon Ikemefuna, he runs to his father figure and "dazed with fear … [draws] his machete and cut[s] him down [,] … afraid of being thought weak" (Achebe 61). This is an important scene in understanding the binary because Ikemefuna sees Okonkwo as his father, and Okonkwo is proud of the way Ikemefuna has influenced his own son, Nwoye; yet Okonkwo cannot sacrifice how his tribesmen see him, not to mention how he sees himself. The perception of his manhood is more important than life. It remains unclear at this point in the novel, even to Okonkwo, if his masculinity is more important than other lives or if the retention of his manhood could absorb even him in death. After Ikemefuna's death, Okonkwo's despair incites the internal, ongoing struggle that tortures and envelops Okonkwo's understanding of his outward connection to the masculine and inward expulsion of the feminine. The particular confusion that Okonkwo cannot justify is how compassion for Ikemefuna, or the feminine, is able to cause him so much pain, especially since he is a warrior who has killed five other men. If he understands that the feminine can wield

power over his mind, then he acknowledges that it has agency, thus distorting his mental reality of Ibo culture.

In his desire to rid himself of Ikemefuna's death, Okonkwo seeks out Obierika who chose not to participate in killing Ikemefuna. Obierika is a foil to Okonkwo because his reflection on common practices and their relation to masculinity say several of the things Okonkwo thinks but would not express. Before the execution of Ikemefuna, Okonkwo laughs at Obierika with the other men because he did not come to kill Ikemefuna, emasculating him among the others. However, he also considers him a close friend, not lazy, who tends his crop for the years he is in exile. Therefore, Obierika becomes the human embodiment of the struggling binary that Okonkwo queries internally about but never perceives clearly enough to develop an understanding of the world beyond the masculine.

Another ongoing confusion in Okonkwo understanding the aforementioned binary he has inculcated is through his children—Nwoye, the disappointment, and Ezinma, the perfect child with the flaw of gender. As Nwoye was previously discussed, the main focus here will be on Ezinma. As his daughter, Okonkwo is exceedingly proud of and internally compassionate for Ezinma. When she is taken to the Oracle, Okonkwo experiences her absence and regard for her as follows:

> He had allowed what he regarded as a reasonable and manly interval to pass and then gone with his machete to the shrine, where he thought they must be. It was only when he had got there that it had occurred to him that the priestess must have chosen to go round the villages first. Okonkwo had

> returned home and sat waiting. When he thought he had waited long enough he again returned to the shrine. But the Hills and the Caves were as silent as death. It was only on his fourth trip that he found Ekwefi, and by then he had become gravely worried. (Achebe 112)

Okonkwo's profound connection to his daughter gains considerable traction as the novel progresses as "she alone understood his every mood" (Achebe 172). Had Okonkwo realized just how much weight that statement carried, he would probably have retracted it. In recognizing that Ezinma understood every part of him, he then acknowledges that a part of the feminine has learned the ability to understand and react to the moods of the masculine. If this is the case, then the feminine has agency alongside the masculine because it is intuitive to the nature and condition of its masculine counterpart. However, even though this bond existed, he still associates Ezinma and her sister as commodities in his re-ascension to prominence upon his return to Umuofia. Okonkwo believes that the act of marriage will become his vehicle to success as he plans to take two new wives himself while communicating directly to Ezinma (who tells her younger sister) that he wishes for her to marry within Umuofia. In this jockeying for position, Okonkwo (potentially) alienates the feminine of four women for the sake of his singular masculinity. This reasserts the previous point that the bridal ceremony, although intended for women, is really only indirectly theirs by the permission of men. The binary boundary Okonkwo puts between himself and Ezinma never falls as he repeatedly insulates his emotion toward the feminine and internally reiterates how he "wish she were a boy" (Achebe 173).

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When colonization occurred, Okonkwo became un-centered and an other himself. Because he was a prominent figure within his tribe from a young age, he was well-versed and comfortable with the customs and traditions of the Ibo people. The new system caused him to experience oppression as the binary switched from men oppressing women to the empire oppressing the colony. Okonkwo, displaced and humiliated by the colonizer, realized the necessity to fight. As Bulhan discusses in *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*:

> No honor, no dignity, no self-respect [remain] for the oppressed who actually are depersonalized individually and collectively. Honor, dignity, and self-respect are restored only in the framework of a national liberation struggle. Such a struggle mobilizes members for a common purpose, galvanizes them into a cohesive group, and integrates them into their own moral imperatives. (223)

This was Okonkwo's mode of thinking as he returned from being a prisoner and encouraged his tribesmen to fight. The new binary that had been created directly emasculated him because violence and aggression were no longer simply in his hands. The ability of the colonizer to execute such brute force was in conflict with Okonkwo's knowledge of his own tribe's strength as a warring community and his warrior roots. The necessity of violence as a means of cathartic freedom from the constraints of colonization is a key point in Gendzier's *Franz Fanon: A Critical Study*: Okonkwo iterates several similar arguments as he, too, thought that "decolonization could only occur…in violent action to individually expunge themselves of the colonial heritage of inferiority and

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submission" (Gendzier 198). The necessity to fight is instinctive for Okonkwo because the binary shift puts him in the previous rank with the feminine. As he is the epitome of the masculine, it is imperative for him to be aggressive and violent in the hope that the binary will shift back and subjugation will be lifted for the Ibo people. If the violence does not purge Umuofia of the colonizing force, then Okonkwo (rightly) must die because there is no longer a place for him. In reaching out to his tribe to fight, he is really making the case for his existence. However, in the end, Okonkwo is unsupported by his community. They questioned the effect violence would have on the colonizer and found themselves in a similar predicament to that described in Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism*:

> A time came when some of the people allowed doubt to enter their minds, and they began to wonder whether it was really possible, quantitatively or qualitatively, to resist the occupant's offensives. Was freedom worth the consequences of penetrating into that enormous circuit of terrorism and counter-terrorism? Did this disproportion not express the impossibility of escaping oppression? (57)

This is important in understanding the entire mental reality of Umuofia because it allows for the colonizer to completely create a new binary that the Ibo people accept, begrudgingly or not. The colonizer was able to manipulate the Ibo so that they were pacifists, an altogether unmanly quality according to their pre-colonial world, and, as previously mentioned, the community had figureheads who enforced colonized occupation, in this case through Egonwanne.

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Okonkwo, from beginning to end, is a character who enforces a binary that he has learned himself. The ultimate defeat comes in his suicide as he knowingly defies his own traditions and never surmounts his tribe, which was his ultimate goal. Being a direct opposite of his father, he never understands the world in terms outside of the Ibo masculine and, thus, perishes with it as his diligence and commitment require. As Gibson writes in *The Postcolonial Imagination*, "the black…finally ends up living in an unreal world determined by the ideals and abstract ideas of another people" (61). Okonkwo could not transition to this "unreal world" because then he would have become unreal. The destruction of the Ibo binary ended Okonkwo as the disappearance of the masculine meant the nonexistence and non-necessity of its character embodiment.

Through the mental processes experienced by the three main groups previously mentioned (children, women, and men), we can gain a better understanding of the changing realities that each has to face and the amount of acceptance or rejection they present based on their previous position within the Ibo culture. The human quality in all of this is the ability to respond to colonization in different ways, as dictated by the previous structure that informed life. What becomes inhuman is the destruction of that previous life by the colonizer. As a result, the colonized are forced to come up with a new schema as previous terms and associations, which were automatic, become redefined:

> Economically, it means the destruction of Indigenous self-sustaining economies and the imposition of market or socialist economies. Politically, it means the destruction of traditional forms of government. Legally, it means that Indigenous oral law and historical rights are

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> invalidated. Socially, it means the destruction of rites of passage. Physically, it means exposure to contagious diseases. Intellectually, it means the invalidation of the Indigenous paradigms and the dominance of an alien language. Spiritually, it means the destruction of ceremonial knowledge. (Bastien, Kremer, Kuokkanen, and Vickers 27)

This list is only a beginning as post-colonial study finds the impact of colonization a continuing presence in a majority of cultures around the world. The greed and parrying dance of land-grabbing by imperialist forces ignores the affect on the history of life that preceded generations of destruction. It not only enforces an unfamiliar binary, but it attempts to evaporate any previous binaries to simply transform the entire identity of a culture, which is impossible.

Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* exacts these arguments because the system and shared understanding of customs and traditions, both in Umuofia and the surrounding nine villages, had transitions and change—but not at the exclusion of the base culture that existed before colonization. There are discussions throughout the book of distinctions between tribes and the changing meanings of common titles and ranks, but those developments and disagreements in cultural traditions were gradual and did not contaminate the water from which each Ibo member drew life. Colonialism devastated the natural order and enforced change through inferiority complexes. It not only stopped gradual change within Umuofia and the other tribes; it disallowed for such action to take place as the public consciousness was too absorbed in the imperialist's relocation of every single pre-colonial member to the periphery. Characters such as Nwoye and the

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women see the ability this mental relocation has to equalize and destabilize the hierarchy of oppression in their own lives. Such a (mis)perception really just trades one subordinated position for another: they choose the devil they don't know over the devil they do. At least in the pre-colonial system, they understood the ground rules. Under imperialism, mental relocation is such that the ground beneath them may swell and fall out because of the complete irrationality of colonizing oppression. It did not need to make sense; pre-colonial members were not vital; and the use of the place was only necessary insofar as it benefiting the colonizer. Okonkwo, for being short-sighted in several aspects, realized this. But the early white influence turned into an enforcing behemoth that the tribes could no longer successfully stand against. It became the peak of the binary food chain where men like Okonkwo previously resided, and it forced them to step down, be subjugated, or die. The world and the colonized mental processing of it changed forever. Even in Okonkwo's death, the sinews of life still hang together as memory grips, for better or worse, a time when there was a predilection for a certain way of life:

> But the war goes on. And for many years to come we shall be bandaging the countless and sometimes indelible wounds inflicting on our people by the colonialist onslaught. (Fanon 181)

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